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MJ: Okay…Let's see…Okay, so we're ready.

S12: Okay, let's begin here. This little plant here is called vicaria. It grows in Puerto Rico, it comes in many colors, but the one that really is useful is this white one, and the part that you use is the flower, this is the flower. You can boil the flower in very very clean water, distilled water if possible, or as pure as you can, and it's used for eye infections, for problems with vision, cataracts, I even use it very successfully for people who are having diabetes when they get eyesight loss. Couple of people that come here, that friend of mine who had a growth in his right eye, that could not be operated until that thing left, he could not get anything to help him, I put him on a treatment of 5 days of this, he said that it stung him a lot but the growth was gone, and he actually had the surgery, and he's recuperating, and so the plant is very, very good. I have a couple of cases of people using it for eye problems, it's a very important plant, very moody, I used to have a lot of them, and they all died, this is the only one I spoil here, so I just dread changing it.

It's growing alongside the rosemary, very good for its astringent properties, very good for that, very good for problems with infection in scalp and rashes, its astringent properties are very good. Besides, it's very known culinary uses. The water is very good to soothe rashes, cure rashes and scalp rashes, very, very useful plant.

Here you have this one, this is called Lemon Verbena in English, Verbena in Peru, we call Yerba luisa also in Cuba. Very relaxing, very nerve relaxing, very good for people who have problems sleeping, or problems in all of the nervous system, acting up is very good combined with another herb that we gonna see later on, those two herbs have the property of lowering the metabolism of the body to a point that even [?it's?] better to take an infusion of this herb on a hot day, and immediately it will cool you off, and it will just relax you to a point that it just- you just feel absolutely great. I don't know why, but it just work like that!

Then, this one here, called Palero in the Caribbean, very important plant for stomach problems, ulcers, stomach ulcers, to use in digestion, to use with acid reflux…Very good…very powerful plant…Very hard to grow here. I bought the seed in Puerto Rico so I grow it here for that particular use. My late mother use to swear by this plant, I mean she would never be caught without it! [laughing], you know?

What we have here, of course this is the plant that is mixed with the Yerba buena, this particular one, it's called orozún, it's a very nice plant, it's not- it's about as sweet as an herb as you can get, and very good for stomach problems along with the other one I showed you before. It's a tropical plant; it's a very delicate plant, but it has the property of creating like a lining in the stomach. It's a very very easy to digest plant, and I tell you it's also used for normal day purposes as to help with the breath. It freshens the breath. You can take a little leaf and see why. It's a natural sweetener, so if you dry it up and you infuse it in a tea, you don't have to use sugar or honey. It's absolutely sweet.

MJ: It's wonderful.

S12: It's a wonderful herb, and if you notice, if you smell it, it's one of those powerful plants with one of the sweetest aromas that you can find. It's a very very lovely plant, and one thing is that it keeps its sweetness even when dry. I mean it just keeps the sweetness and the aroma; it doesn't lose it. And then we have, and then--oh! Before that, look what we have here is one variety of mint. Where my people- in Spanish, this is called "Yerba Buena." Very good for care, for colics in babies, and also for stomach problems, for insomnia, you know alongside with warm milk. It's a very old, old, sweet remedy. Like I remember when I was very young, my mother prescribing it for anyone who- as the first line of treatment before getting to heavier stuff. And then we have here, spearmint, a variety of spearmint. This particular variety is very, very fragrant, very fragrant, absolute fragrance, and it's very good also for skin problems, also for mouthwash. It has the property, especially when you have a tooth pulled and stuff like that, you know you gargle with it, it's very good. Besides its obvious aromatic properties, it has the ability of helping heal particularly stubborn tooth problems. Especially if you take it with the clove, the spice that tends to numb the tooth, they put it in for pain.

Around here we have this one, this is bergamot, and this plant is very good especially to purify rooms where sick people are, it clears the air. It just make it crispier, more breathable, especially because sick people's rooms tend to be closed, and very rare to open it, and the air gets very stale. Bergamot is very good to, it kinda cleanse the air around it. It freshens the air, it's very very good this particular Bergamot. Around here…okay…[humming]…there's some beautiful plants here…[humming]….okay, let's see…Okay, let's go down here.

This is myrtle. Very very nice plant to…it has multiple uses. First of all, probably the most divinable it's one of the four trees that grow in the Muslim paradise. I learned that not to long ago, I didn't know that. Myrtle is a very important plant to keep around you especially in rooms, apparently it absorbs the humor--the bad humors. For instance, some people put it under the pillows and they lie in bed with the, burning it, it's very good to absorb bad humors from the body, especially associated with infections, with indigestions, and things like that. And it's very automatic as well, very automatic, extremely automatic. Right here we have a coffee tree.

MJ: Now, which one is this, there's several of them.

S12: The tall- the green one, let me show it to you. Here's the coffee tree, you can see it.

MJ: Oh yeah.

S12: It's already having a fruit, so it's full of coffee beans. One of the only one--the only person in Los Angeles that has a full blown coffee tree, but the leaves are very good for its quality of helping heala burn wound or hard-to heal wounds, especially in diabetes, very good…uh, bleeding ulcers, an infusion of the new growth, it helps stop bleeding ulcers, very important tree here. Of course the fruit, you know, we just are so impartial to it, coffee.

MJ: Do you have plantains there?

S12: Yeah, yeah… This is the eternal rue. Rue has the ability to be a very potent laxative, so for constipation, indigestion this plant has to be very carefully used because pregnant women should not take it. It can induce labor. So this is one of the oldest remedies in the Caribbean for unwanted pregnancy. Usually people rarely- you know, women will take a couple of days of rue and all of a sudden, "Oh look what happened! I just lost the pregnancy!" [laughing] So there's a saying on the island, you know, it says that when they see a pregnant woman, and then she's not pregnant, they always say that "she was busy with the rue." [laughing] But it's very good for stomach problems, and especially for what we call "Empacho," which is when food gets stuck into the walls of the stomach, and it won't come out, so it's key, and you use the whole thing- the leaves, the stalk, the stem, use everything. It's very very powerful. I Personally don't like too much the aroma of it.

MJ: How do you give it for Empacho? Is it a tea?

S12: You can do it as a tea, you can also do it as a poultice, macerate it and apply it a massage. But, that's--usually for kids it's not like that because of the strength, but most of the time it's done as a tea because it forces the muscles of the stomach to kind of move, and expel whatever is stuck there. So empacho is a very common condition especially when people change diets, so in here I see a lot of empacho, Los Angeles, many people who change from countries and stuff like that, and they eat too much of what they should not. So empacho is a very important thing. That's why probably the rue is so much all over the place because you know, I assume that being in Los Angeles is the place where you can eat so much stuff from so many parts of the world sometimes you really do too much of a good thing, and you can get into real big problem. So rue grows here a lot. This is Papaya. The fruit of course is very good for digestion. The leaf and the stem of the leaf is used for intestinal problems, not so much stomach, but you know like the big intestine and that type of stuff.

MJ: How is it used?

S12: It's boiled, but you have to be very careful because amount is everything. This plant, as lovely as it is, it can, if you don't know how to deal with it,it can do more harm than good. You have to be very careful. And contrary to what people think, in this case, the leaf is not as strong as the stem. So, you tend to--you better go the leaves first, and then the stem can be really potent. Especially, the new growth, that's what you go for. You know, we never try- see, one of the rules with plants is that you never go to the old growth 'cause the old growth has already over-extended its potency. You want the new growth which is where the potency of the leaf is. And of course you don't cut the whole thing because then you lose the tree, but the old leaves, you leave them alone because it will support the tree while you develop new growth. So the idea that you cut the whole thing and raze it down just doesn't work. You have to leave because the next time you need it, you don't have it, and that's a big problem…

Here, this particular tree here, saúco blanco grows all over Los Angeles, it's a very good filler plant. It grows all over L.A. This is the state flower, you can see it there, I mean, on this branch. Gotta honor the state flower. And the flower and the leaf is very good for

people with ingrown nails, tired feet, problems with flat feet, you know, you can soak, and it will relax, it will help you to achieve, to ease the pain, especially people with flat people have suffered a lot with the leg, when they work they had to stand a lot…uh, tired legs, you know, it has this soothing ability, and you just mix it…Take the flower and the leaves, you mix both, and you put it in a foot bath, very very very good for that, for those purposes.

Lemon, this poor thing, the lemon tree, lemon is one of those universal panaceas. Lemon is good for almost anything, I mean, you know. The fruit is very useful as an antiseptic, it's very useful for…the whole fruit is useful. The leaves--this one is sick, so I have to cut it to bring it back- the leaves, the new growth again, used to soothe problems with stomach and especially something called "reflux" or hiatal hernias- also very good, the leaves taken in a tea or an infusion, or on a poultice applied to the affected area, very, very, very good.

That's the fence…this one right here, Angel Trumpet. This is Angel Trumpet [campana]. The root is very useful. You have to be very careful when you use it. It's a very potent- it's got some very strange properties that it can do to people, but it's very good to treat, what we call "Cansancio" [tiredness] People like anemia or people who are always tired or have no kind of energy or stamina for anything. So the root is very useful for that, and of course, the higher you go on the tree, the weaker the potency, so you have to try the least amount possible, the weakest plant that you can because it's easier to keep increasing whereas if you start with a strong, very strong dosage, you can lead into a big mess, and then how do you reduce it? So, it's like when you're cooking. It's easier to add more salt than to take it out once you add it. So you know, this is a very important tree.

MJ: So it has hallucinogenic properties?

S12: It does, it does…Yeah, people- I remember when I was young in Peru, we got people who boil the root and take it with beer, and get on these crazy trips. Especially these people who don't have the money to buy the drugs off the street, so there was a huge campaign to eradicate the tree. And of course it doesn't work to get rid of it because this is also very good on water wells. You know, this is the tree of choice to plant near a water well, so the roots can grow into the water, and of course the best water you can drink is that one. It's the most relaxing, the most exhilarating water you can take for obvious reasons: the interaction of the root and the water. And I remember my grandfather, on my grandfather's farm used to be a well, and I remember walking around, I remember making it a point when we were thirsty not to go to the house, we would go to the well. Even if we were just dying, we just liked the well because it's better. That was the most famous well ever in the whole place it was ridiculous. And then later I discovered why I liked it so much! And I remember we would sit there and drink to your satisfaction, and feel so good. Now I know why.

Around here, this is the llantén. This plant is very, very, very good for people who suffer from cancer and cancer-related diseases and stuff like that. The seeds and stuff like that, I mean, it's drunk in tea, especially for those people who are recovering from chemo. It's very important, it's very useful. It's very important because you drink it as common water. It tastes like nothing, but it's very, very good, and I have very good results with

people recovering from chemo drinking this particular tea. And this, how do you make this drink- just that, nothing else, but to boil it a lot.

MJ: What does it overcome from chemo? Is it the fatigue?

S12: The fatigue, the pains related to it. I mean the whole- it seems to have an overall well-developed effect on the person's body. So it's a very good plant. It grows- it's like, this is a real big- it's a gardener's pest, it's a gardener's nightmare but it grows all over. That's the wonderful thing, and it grows all over all year around. I mean, there's no way to kill this thing. If you cannot find it- these are very very big, as you can see right there there's big leaves as well as we go over there…but, you know that's a good thing because if you need to get it, just walk around UCLA and look down and you'll see little plants like this. It grows ALL OVER. There's no way you can kill that thing. So winter, summer, spring, whatever, you can always get it. Very important plant, very important. This starts as a seed and then get black, completely black when mature, I mean there are thousands of tiny seeds, oh here it is- a dry one. What you do, see what I mean?

MJ: Yeah.

S12: One stalk like this can really do a lot of--cover a lot of territory. So you get one, two, three, four, five, six, seven! Here's the one I cut already…Yes I have enough thank you! And it keeps growing. See? Now, let's move around.

[TAPE CUTS]

S12: [humming] Now, here he is again, the llantén. That's a big one of them. I clippings from that one so. . . . That's a good one. Okay. And they're, you have to our right, there's another plant that we want. . . . This plant. It's called poleo tambia also like the one I showed you, but that's from the Caribbean. I call this- they call it poleo Mexican, uh…Mexicans call it poleo. And as you can see, they have the same name, but they don't have the same structure, and this poleo is also used in teas, also for problems that has to do with infected wounds with infected…also, very good for ulcers in teas. Which is interesting because every poleo is very good for the stomach, it's main use stomach problems, and this one is more drastic thing like ulcers, and digestion, upset stomach, things like that, this one goes on where the others stop, so that's very interesting, at least for me. And, I tell you, that plant was a swap between me and a client who had problems, and I gave her that, and she said, "But this is not poleo, this is poleo," I said, "Oh, I'll bring you the poleo plant, this is what we use it for," and she brought me that plant, and that's how this one got into my garden. Okay, cotton right here. The leaves, very good, besides the treatment purposes, applied as it is to help swell insect bites, and stuff like that, the swelling of insect bites.

MJ: It reduces the swelling in insect bites?

S12: Yeah, yeah, just apply it just like that.

MJ: Just the leaf, huh?

S12: Just the leaf…Just the leaf on the tree. And then…Let's go, I'm sorry, I want to show you another plant. . . . I'm telling you! Look, there's another one right there.

MJ: Sure is.

S12: It's amazing! That plant is the most invasive plant I've seen in my life.

[door opening]

S12: Okay…

MJ: Just lead the way.

S12: This way. This particular plant, it's called tree of life. "Maravilla" in Cuba, "Yerba bruja" in Puerto Rico. This plant is a succulent, the leaf. On each one of these crevices-- each one of these crevices is a plant, if you put it on the ground, each crevice is gonna sprout another plant. When I was a kid, we use it as bookmarkers. We stopped using it because we realize that our parents knew we were not reading because the leaf would sprout, and you'd see plants coming out of the book! [laughing] But, besides being busted for using it as a bookmarker, the leaf is very good, it's very oily, and you heat it, and it will yield a very green oil. Warm is used for ear aches and ear infections, so this is going back to the way I said, the way that we will find it all over-- it grows all over, see what I mean? See, you'll find it in crevices, wherever there's a space to grow, I mean, that baby will grow. So, this plant, applied, you know, heated and with the oil, is put straight into the ear for ear infections and earaches and ear related problems. Also, we heat it over the fire just to- for it to exude just a little bit of the oil when you put it over the fire, just kind of to make it exude the oil, you know, it's applied directly into the areas, so you're like this…When you want to use the oil, just to force it to get into the skin for ear problems. Very very very important plant in this sense. Okay.

Let me see which one we have here….Uh, what else do we have here. And you can put this on a book and watch it…It's called "Yerba Bruja," the witch leaf because of that. It grows into any place. I mean you put it anywhere, and before you know it, you'll start seeing little hairs, the roots, and in a couple of days, you have a tiny plant, and it keeps growing until it consumes the leaf, and then you have to plant it. So that's why they call it the witch leaf. Yerba Bruja in Puerto Rico, in Puerto Rico, okay? Let's see….Oh yes, "Romerillo." This one here, it should be dead but I don't have the heart to yank it out.

MJ: What is that one?

S12: That's called romerillo, a little Rosemary. Here it is. And here are the flowers. It's lovely, lovely kind of weed. [laughing] Really, that's what it is…Amarillo, very, very good for people with diabetes to bring down the blood sugar levels.

MJ: As a tea?

S12: As a tea.

MJ: As a flower?

S12: No, no, the leaves, the whole thing, you just boil the whole thing. Very, very nice, and it's a lovely aroma, but this is just basically what you see when you go into the fields. I mean, it's a weed, it's just a plain old weed, and no one cultivates it, and that is because it's all over. You want it, you got it to begin with. But here, I'm cultivating it because you can't find it. So, I cultivate it, and it- see the flower that break- see this? It's a little black spike that will cling to the cloth- it's a nightmare, and those little spikes, when they mature, they're like- a lot of them, it reproduce a plant. So with one plant, you can get the whole place taken.

And that's called "Amarillo," and it's very good as you noticed, they have a very interesting aroma, very pungent. That is very good for people with diabetes as a tea to bring down sugar levels and to help people who are taking medication to control sugar levels. You know usually, everyone says, "Oh Amarillo, you only have to take Amarillo, and drink it as common water." You get you can take it as common water, and you boil a lot of them. Again, this is a plant that grows so profusely in the Caribbean, you don't have to plant it, you just go out, boil it, and you know, make a big batch and just drink it, and you don't have to cultivate it. This is just basically here because it's out of its environment, but it's tolerating very well the winter. I just cut it- I cut it to make a new growth, and that will do it.

This is another type of sage, it's a California variety of sage, and used for body aches. You boil it, take a tub bath with the water for body aches. It's very good. Another- let me take you to another plant, it's another plant, this is the Caribbean sage, so let's come because we have ways to go. Phew! I forgot because it's behind the whole thing. This is sage; this is the California variety, and this is the variety from the Caribbean. This is this one I brought from Puerto Rico. I brought the seed and grew it. It's a little plant. I mean, you know, this plant is so crazy it hides. We've been running around it and it's hiding from us, let me, we have to get in here…

MJ: Okay.

S12: This is a Caribbean--this is salvia. This is a Caribbean variety of sage, so you can notice the leaf is very velvety, you can touch it, it's very soft, very velvety, it's very good for colds, you know those stubborn colds that won't leave you. But, it has a drawback. This plant is what we call a hot plant. Once you either bathe or use it in poultices, you have to remain inside, you cannot come out into the fresh air because it can react very badly. So normally, when people do it with salvia, we tell people that you have to stay in bed, usually to sweat colds, to make them sweat, and to get out of this stubborn condition of cold, you know, with this long, long colds. So you put it, either in poultice on chest for asthma, but you can't- you have to remain in your room. You can't come out into the fresh air until the next day. So it's a very good plant, but it's a very problematic plant to deal with. Everyone will tell you that "La salvia pasma," and "pasma" in the island is when you come out and you can get, for example with this plant, you can get muscle spasms, and you can get stiff muscles. I mean, it's a very problematic plant, but because it's so problematic, at the same time it's so good. And of course, the idea is there's a pun named "Salvia" that is very close to the word "salvar," to save. So it's a pun then. It's a Caribbean sage…

MJ: The California sage, is it considered neutral or cold?

S12: It's not even considered near neutral, [?cold?] and neutral are really the same because it doesn't have that quality of reacting badly, I mean you can work with it and you have no problem. Anyone who work with this plant, and you ask them from the Caribbean, and you say, "You know I'm on 'salvia,'" and they'll say, "Oh, yeah, but be careful with that plant," because it's very problematic to deal with. Especially because you can use it for a bad cold and you know, force it out. It will force you to sweat, it will force you to expectorate, and stuff like that, but at the same time you come out in the open, and then you can get all twisted from muscle aches and muscle spasms, it's very very problematic. It's here, it grows very well here. Haven't been able to propagate it well, I put it there just momentarily, and [?it seemed good?] so I just left it m

MJ: When you say "we use it," what's your role?

S12: Well we use it, it's used in Lucumí traditionally used in Spiritism, in Lucumí traditionally it's used in Babalú Aye ceremonies especially, Babalú Aye being the oricha of the infectious diseases. And in Spiritism it's used in baths because of the pun of the name-- "Salvia," "salvar," to be saved from-- generally, in general use…I learned this from my mother, I mean, this was like the thing every time we got cold. There were five of us in the house, so you can imagine, it was a chain you know? One would get it, that meant that we will all get it. [laughing] So there was a lot of salvia going back and forth, and, I've been asthmatic all my life, so has Eddy, you know, so we used to it. So, I made a point of getting me a salvia plant because I knew I will use it, and I will need it. Especially after [my son] was born and he came down with asthma as well, so you know it's like, it's the treatment of choice for asthma. And I did not learn that purposely just out of . . . my mother would use it. It was all over the place all the time. All over the place! I mean, it was like the thing to do.

Certain plants are common in gardens. You have to- if you go to a traditional garden you will not find hundreds of herbs. Usually, the island- what happens is that will three or four, he will grow three or four different ones, and so on and so on, grow three or four, and then as needed, you go around the neighborhood because many of them are weeds like I showed you, so you don't have to grow them, but for example rosemary and sage and marjoram and spearmint, and mint…All those plants are more delicate to grow. So people who specialize, so you will never find a complete guidance of the species, it is understood that if you have a better hand to grow one plant, why should I struggle with it if it's easier for me to go and ask you for it. You know what I mean?

So you will find certain plants according to where they grow best, and then you will go around the neighborhood. That's the way it is- at least when I was growing up that's the way it was done. My mother would say, "Go to so-and-so, and tell her to send me a couple of sprigs of…" and then "Go to so and so…" and then before you know it, you have the whole table full of plants from all over the neighborhood. That way, you can't afford to fight with your neighbors because they might have a plant that you might need sometime, and then how can you get it? [laughing]. So it forces the "Good Neighbor Policy." [laughing].

Many of the plants that you see around are for ritual purposes. They don't have any particular medicinal purpose. They have use in ritual, in Lucumí ritual, Espiritism ritual,

and that's one thing. The one I showed you, the tree of life, there's another variety here…This is a different variety, it's more- it's thicker, the leaf is wider, see? But it's the same general plant, I mean it has the same properties, but it's a different variety of a plant. So, what you're gonna see is that many of these plants are…it's very hard to get a garden that is totally full in the sense of the things that you need because of that, so many times people have certain plants and you canvas the area, there's certain plants that you know where you can get 'em. There's some plants that, someone has 'em, so you just go there.

MJ: So the tree of life, it doesn't matter which variety?

S12: Well, I haven't used this one. Because I'm lucky enough to have that one. You know what I mean? And that's the one I know. This one was a gift, a gift that was given to me as an oddity, really, as a variety, another variety. But I have that one, so I stick with the one I know about, and to try to experiment with this one. So as soon as I hear that's the one that's usually successful and whatever, then we'll see about it, but in the meantime I have it there, and I have it- it's basically that. But, it grows the same way, it has the very same property--it grows from the leaves, and the whole plant is succulent. Okay?

MJ: Yeah.

S12: All right. What else is there? Oh yes. This is a type of oregano. It's called "Oregano Brujo," witch's oregano. But, it's very good for cooking, especially to take the gas out of the food. Cause you know that with a heavy diet of almost anything, you know that's a very important plant to have [chuckling]…So it has the very same…

MJ: Same smell?

S12: Almost, except it's a little bit more pungent than is the other oregano, the garden variety that we all know of.

MJ: You use it fresh or…dried or just…?

S12: Both. This is dried, the dried leaf. It's very powerful, and you can use it fresh if you're lucky enough to have it fresh, or you can use it dry. It's very good when you're dealing with, for example, you know that in the Caribbean, there is a lot of blood sausage that is made and stuff like that-- that goes in there. In other words, you can't make it without that. But, beans, all legumes, it's very important to drop a couple of leaves in there to relieve the gas from the legumes.

MJ: This is just garden variety oregano or some special one?

S12: This grows wild all over the place the other one is more garden variety because that one you really cultivate it it's really rare that you find the other one anywhere, but this one you can be walking be down the street and bingo there it is, it's very hardy, you don't have to take care of it, it takes care of itself.

MJ: But the other one doesn't have the same properties as this one?

S12: The other one I know as a culinary herb, but this one has the property of flavor, aroma and also the added benefit that if you have problems with gas, gastritis it will help you when it comes to legumes. This one it takes…this one I cut it about two weeks ago, look it's to big, and you know what it is waiting for? It is waiting for, it will drip and as soon as it finds a place to take root it will, this plant is so horrible. I cut it about two weeks ago and I just realized now that the crazy thing just moved, look…see, so as soon as you take this and cut it and put it some where, it goes, it's very hardy, it's really hard to kill, you cant kill this thing, so it's a weed, it has a weed like qualities, it's very good for survival….I think that's about it.

MJ: OK.